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ABSTRACT

An in-depth study was conducted of instructional improvement activities at Kansas State University, including a student evaluation instrument of teacher performance, called Instructional Development and Effectiveness Assessment (IDEA). Faculty reactions to the total evaluation system, the use of results for multiple purposes, and the current status of teaching at the university were obtained through structured interviews. User reactions were obtained on the student evaluation instrument, the administrative procedures, the computer report, the interpretive guide, and the activities of the Office of Educational Improvement. A study was conducted to compare pre-test and post-test results for faculty members who have used services provided by the Office of Educational Improvement and those who have not. The relationship between salary increments and teaching effectiveness was also investigated. Among the findings of the assessment program were that faculty members can improve their teaching through the use of a diagnostic tool, and that those who made the greatest gains were motivated to change and had the services of an "expert" available to assist them. It was also noted that not all faculty will, or need to, participate in each faculty development activity; but if enough variety is provided, most faculty members will participate in at least some development activities. (SW)

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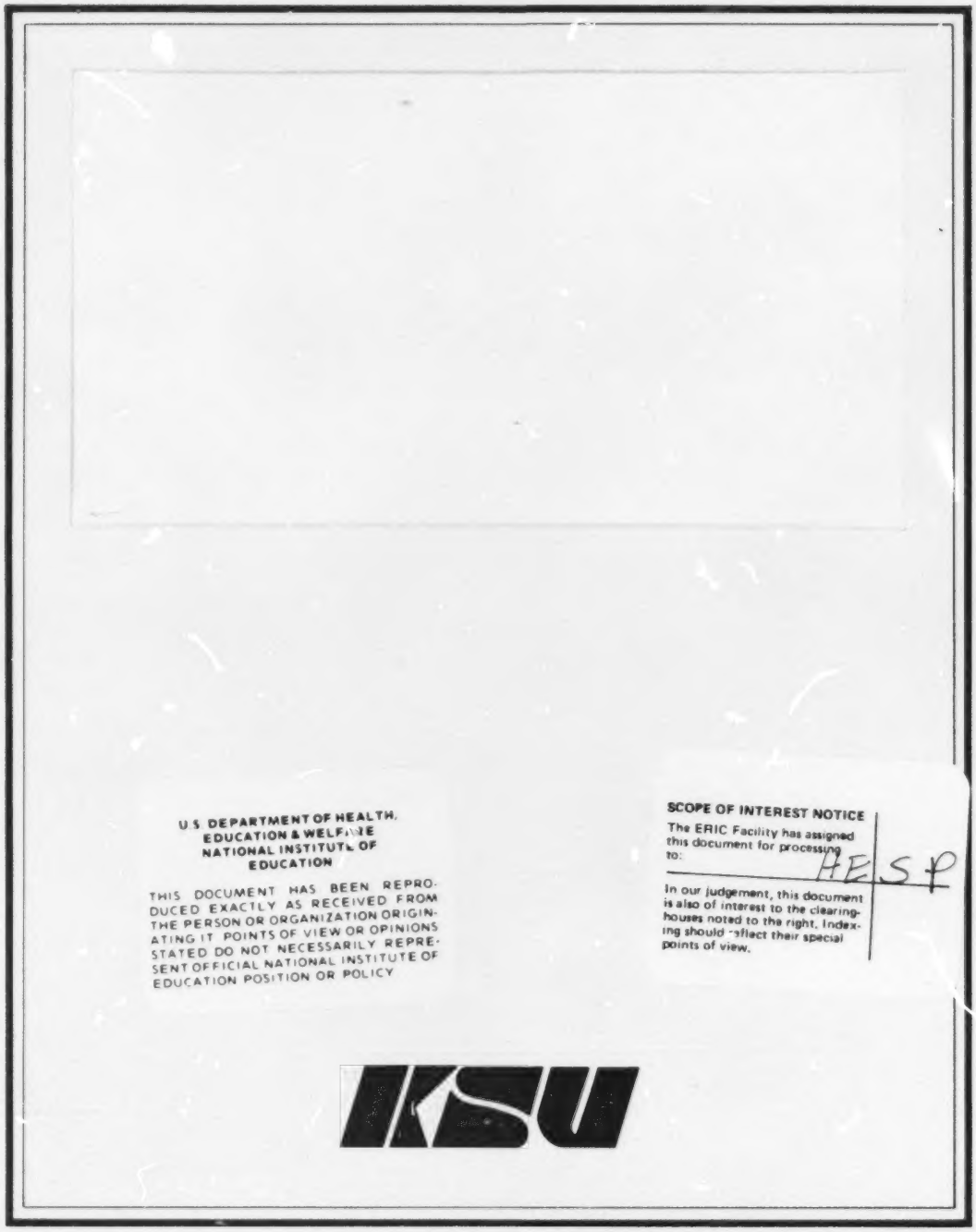

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KSU

# Kansas State University

## Manhattan, Kansas

Final Report

# NATIONAL PROJECT III

## Elevating the Importance of Teaching

Richard E. Owens

September, 1977

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## BACKGROUND

### The Setting

Kansas State University is a land grant institution and reflects such an institution's traditional emphasis on professional education. A healthy balance between teaching, research and service has been established. Faculty members have been rewarded through the merit system for years and have maintained high institutional identity even through the years of high mobility. Ninety percent of the faculty say they like their positions, and teaching is generally regarded as an important function. There is a high degree of homogeneity of opinion throughout the eight colleges of the university. The areas of greatest concern seem to be salaries, fringe benefits and plans for future job security, but no "burning issues" which might interfere with normal campus activity have been identified. (Research Report #35).

In this environment, it is not surprising to find continued efforts to improve instruction. Most commonly, these efforts have included departmental programs, programs sponsored by "Effective teaching committees" within the various colleges, and University or college-wide workshops and seminars. Such "self-help" programs have been undertaken regularly in the past and continue to be strong.

### The Instrument: Development and Current Status

A more focussed effort began in 1968-69. The impetus for this was the desire to develop a means for collecting student ratings of teaching which, through proper feedback, could serve as a guide to instructional improvement. With the assistance of a small grant from the United States Office of Education, a unique device for diagnosing instructional problems was developed. This device was the fore-runner of what is known today as Instructional Development and Effectiveness Assessment (IDEA).

Practical implementation was attempted in 1969-70. The reception from the faculty was not overly favorable. Informal inquiry suggested that the main reasons for this were: (a) the process was identified with the administration, raising doubts among some faculty members about whether or not confidentiality would be honored and leading others to believe that there must be some ulterior motive for the program and (b) the feedback system was so complex and "statistical" that the ordinary teacher had great difficulty in interpreting the report and using it constructively.

These difficulties were overcome, to a degree, in 1970-71, when a highly regarded member of the College of Education was appointed as Director of Educational Improvement. By placing the program under his control, faculty suspicions were allayed. Furthermore, the Director constituted a viable resource to faculty members for interpreting reports and making constructive suggestions for improvement. As a result, voluntary participation increased in both 1970-71 and again in 1971-72.

Experience with the program led to a realization that some aspects of the assessment needed strengthening. A key element of the system required faculty members to identify their instructional emphases from a list of eight objectives; by 1972, it was apparent that this list needed revision. Furthermore, certain of the teaching behavior items which were used for diagnostic purposes had been shown to be ineffective (unrelated to student ratings of progress on any objective). Finally, most faculty members expressed a desire for a 5-response format, rather than the "True-False" format originally employed. Accordingly, a revision was prepared which eliminated ineffective teacher behavior items and included a rewritten and expanded list of objectives, a few new items which the literature suggested might have diagnostic significance, and a 5-alternative response format. The entire developmental process (reliability, validity, factor structure, norming) was repeated for the new form, and a new manual was written.

Although the revised form was well received by the faculty and voluntary participation increased again, growing student and faculty resistance to the length of the device was encountered. In 1973, an alternative "Short Form" was developed, using previously collected statistical data. In developing this version, special attention was paid to another complaint, namely, that the computer-generated report was difficult to read and interpret. The Short Form and its report were instant successes and soon accounted for about sixty percent of faculty requests for service. By 1975, it became apparent that two versions of the form were unnecessary. A poll of all faculty who used the longer version during the spring of 1975 indicated that only 5% had any concern about dropping the longer version after seeing the short one and its companion report.

In the fall of 1975, the Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development in Higher Education was established (through the assistance of the Kellogg Foundation) to expand the use of the system to promote faculty development beyond the KSU campus. Through the combined efforts of KSU and Center personnel, a third revision of the evaluation materials was prepared.

The 1975 version included only minor changes in the Survey Form; a question on how thoughtfully students responded was added, as were several demographic items of interest for research purposes. The Norms were completely revised to be more sensitive to differences related to class sizes and motivation levels. The Report itself was significantly improved by several new features (most of these in response to suggestions of former users):

1. Norm comparisons were made to other classes of similar size and motivation, as well as to all classes in the norm groups;

2. Diagnostic information for targeting improvement efforts was greatly simplified and presented in a clear fashion;

3. A Summary Profile was added to provide easier synthesis and for more convenient administrative decision-making if the faculty member chose to submit his results for such a purpose;

4. The printing of responses to Additional Questions was made a routine section of the Report.

The Interpretive Guide was revised accordingly. Minor improvements have been made since this revision, and constant monitoring is done to keep materials updated and responsive to user needs.

The system began as a confidential method for aiding volunteers in improving their instructional effectiveness. Today it retains its voluntary, confidential features; however, accountability pressures and other factors have resulted in its use for both self-improvement and administrative decision-making in many cases. Faculty reactions to this change will be reported on later in this paper.

Voluntary participation in the system at KSU has grown from fewer than 80 classes in 1969-70 to more than 1,600 classes per year; over 750 faculty members (about 75% of the total) used the program over a recent three semester period. In addition, during the 1976-77 school year the Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development in Higher Education processed over 10,000 classes from 80 colleges and universities.

Related Developments

Although the assessment program is a major element in the KSU program for elevating the importance of teaching, it is not the only element. The "Outstanding Teacher Award" program, consisting of two cash awards of $1,000 and two of $500, is a good example of additional efforts in this regard. Largely through efforts of the Director of Educational Improvement, this program has gained considerable prestige among the faculty. A prominently displayed plaque, containing the engraved names of all winners, is found in the foyer of the main library.

Additional activities which have focussed attention on the importance of teaching include (a) special seminars conducted by the Director of Educational Improvement, (b) workshops for selected groups (all faculty in a single college; all GTA's, etc.) on a variety of instructional concerns; (c) regular communication with all faculty members via a teaching newsletter; (d) one-to-one interaction with faculty members requesting assistance; (e) a continuing series of research reports related to teaching at KSU. Scheduled courses on "Principles of College Teaching" (twice a year) and "Issues in College Teaching" (once a year) are taught by the Director of Educational Improvement and regularly attract a mixture of graduate students, graduate teaching assistants and KSU faculty members.

## THE PROBLEM

The original proposal was to attempt to increase the importance of teaching by (a) making an in-depth study of the instructional improvement in general and the instrument in particular and (b) making adjustments in the system which such an investigation suggested. The investigation was to be conducted through a series of specific studies.

### Proposed Studies

1. A systematic assessment of user reactions to the instrument, the administrative procedures, the computer report, the interpretive guide and the activities of the Office of Educational Improvement. Suggestions for improvement were sought.

2. A study of the areas where the system does not provide adequate assistance. We hoped to establish how large a portion of the faculty this included and to discover criteria for building supplementary devices.

3. An examination of the practice of using student ratings for both administrative and improvement purposes. We wanted to discover frequency of this practice and faculty reaction to it so that we could make firmer recommendations about it.

4. A study comparing pre- and post-test results for faculty members who have used the services provided by the Office of Educational Improvement and those who have not. This study was intended to evaluate the effectiveness of an office whose purpose was to help faculty members improve their instruction.

5. An examination of the views of representative faculty members as to the current status of teaching as a professional activity at KSU and the steps they recommended to enhance its importance. We sought information about the KSU "atmosphere" as well as ideas about approaches to enhancing teaching's importance.

6. A follow-up study to determine correlations between teaching effectiveness and salary increments at KSU. We wanted to determine if teaching effectiveness was "rewarded" through increased financial remuneration.

### Methods

Several approaches were used to collect the primary data for this investigation. Structured interviews were especially effective in assessing faculty reactions to the total evaluation system, to the use of results for multiple purposes, and to the current status of teaching

as a profession at KSU. Though time consuming, the interview permitted an in-depth pursuit of these topics as well as a very personal focus for the investigation.

Mailed questionnaires were used for some parts of the study to obtain broad input on a variety of questions from both students and faculty. Care was taken to insure that return rates were high enough to yield dependable conclusions.

The third approach used required statistical analysis of data already collected at KSU and the Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development in Higher Education. In some instances, these data were related to other data from University records or officials.

## RESULTS

### User Reactions and Suggestions

On the whole, procedures for participating in the evaluation program were viewed as quite satisfactory. (See Research Report #44). Less than 5% identified negative features. Administration of the survey does not seem to be a problem, and most users are following the guidelines presented in the materials.

Seventy-one percent reported that they were able to categorize their own teaching goals by using the 10 objectives provided; no statistically significant differences were found among the subgroups defined by discipline, rank, tenure status, experience with the system, overall evaluation status, or size-motivation category of courses. It appears that the difficulties with the objectives are concentrated in a small number of individual situations, some of which employed unique teaching styles.

Most reported that the Survey Form itself was satisfactory; criticisms were concentrated on the Methods section. Humanities instructors were the most critical, while social/behavioral scientists were the least. This supports the belief that the IDEA system may not fit the studio type class (prevalent in the humanities) or the laboratory class (prevalent in the natural sciences) as well as it does the more traditional lecture/discussion class.

The solution proposed earlier in our work -- special forms for different types of classes -- was abandoned when it became apparent that no one form could fit all studio type classes or all laboratory classes. Further, informal exploration with several faculty members teaching these "special" classes revealed that, though there are differences from traditional classes, there are also many similarities. As an alternative, we decided to encourage instructors teaching

studio or laboratory classes to use those parts of the IDEA Survey Form which were appropriate and to supplement them with additional questions. This approach retains the advantage of providing comparability of at least some of the results; at the same time, it allows flexibility to meet specific needs.

A list of extra questions suitable for special teaching situations has been prepared and is now made available to participants on a routine basis. This may be responsible, in part, for the encouraging finding that 42% of the KSU faculty supplemented the IDEA system with additional questions.

Further evidence as to the adequacy of the device came from student responses to the question, "How well did the questions on this form permit you to describe your impressions of this instructor and course?" The KSU students responded: 9.9% Very Well; 54.2% Quite Well; 25.1% Not Very Well; 5.3% Poorly; 5.6% Omit.

Thus both students and faculty members reported that the form was appropriate for most classes but is not well suited to some types of classes or teaching situations without being supplemented by individual additional questions.

Arguments against using student input in the overall evaluation of teaching are often bolstered by the opinion that students are not conscientious in their responses. However, fewer than 2% of the students say they did not "give thoughtful consideration to the questions" (item #39 on the Survey Form) and only 17% of KSU faculty users were clearly skeptical of student conscientiousness. (See Research Report #44).

It is also interesting to note that 50% of the KSU faculty suggest that obtaining student ratings every semester is advisable, and 23% more would not rule this out under some circumstances. In a system where both faculty and students are quite used to teacher evaluation, there would appear to be much less resistance to their use than one might think from the comments of the few. Maybe we have underestimated the tolerance of both groups.

By far the greatest criticism was directed to the three items about examinations. This confirmed unsolicited comments received over the past two years. As a result, work is underway to improve these items or replace them with better ones.

The IDEA Report has been well received by the users and the changes made over the past appear to have improved the utility of the results. It was reassuring to discover that most of the faculty paid particular attention to progress ratings on those objectives which they specified as essential or important; but it was somewhat disheartening to learn that they preferred to make their own interpretations of the results rather than to follow the Diagnostic Summary. This may lead to overemphasis on techniques which, though rated low by students, are unrelated to success on the particular objectives which were important to the instructor.

Participants expressed a desire for both statistical data and descriptive labels to help them interpret evaluation results. Sixty-one percent of the KSU sample used both, while 34% used only descriptive information, and the remaining 5% used only statistical data. Faculty members reported that it was helpful to compare current results with those from previous semesters as well as with the norms for "similar classes" and "all classes" at the institution.

Seven out of ten faculty said they have read the Interpretive Guide thoroughly. Because of the complexity of the IDEA System, the Guide is necessary not only to obtain a complete understanding but also to avoid misunderstanding. Those who received average ratings from their students tended to use the Guide less than other groups. Reasons given for not reading it thoroughly were: (1) it takes too much time, (2) the narrative is too technical and difficult, and (3) one can interpret as much as needed from the Report itself.

A relatively small proportion of users (13%) reported being bothered by the thought of seeing their results. Most denied experiencing anxiety at the thought of receiving their Reports. Furthermore, over 70% felt that more effective methods of providing results were not needed. Suggestions for improvement were largely focussed on better communication of the current procedures rather than on change in the procedures themselves.

In summary, participants generally found the form, the administrative procedures, the report, and the interpretive aids to be satisfactory. This finding should be placed in perspective; nearly all these matters have been revised three to five times on the basis of informal user feedback and suggestions from authorities in the field. To expect such high satisfaction from inexperienced users of a newly created program would probably be unrealistic.

The major changes needed involved (a) items regarding examinations and (b) making the form sufficiently flexible for use in a variety of teaching situations. The latter need has already been addressed by devising an "optional item" section and providing a printed aid to assist instructors in using it. Work is underway to revise the items on examinations.

Factors Affecting Ratings

Faculty teach under a variety of circumstances. There is a common feeling among educators that such factors as quality of students, previous experience with the course, faculty desire to teach the course, course innovations, work overloads, and opportunities to know the students are in large part responsible for the ratings made by students. In an extensive regression analysis study, the conclusion was that these "extraneous circumstances" do have an impact both on student ratings of progress and on the faculty member's teaching effort; however, the magnitude

of this impact was slight compared to that of class size and student motivation, which are routinely taken into account by the IDEA system. (Research Report #40). Although more work needs to be done in this area, it appears that the importance of these variables may have been exaggerated.

Another issue of considerable concern to many is the effect of grades and grading policies on student responses to teacher evaluation scales. A related concern is the fear that faculty may grade more leniently to encourage better ratings. Research at KSU suggests that "lenient" grading practices will not "purchase" favorable student ratings, but "harsh" grading is likely to result in lower student ratings. However, students reported they were more attracted to courses where the professor repeatedly grades "easy" and more likely to avoid those with a "hard" grading reputation. (Research Report #36).

Analyses of over 4,500 classes evaluated by the Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development in Higher Education and 3,500 classes at KSU revealed only a low positive correlation (.23) between the grades students expect to receive in the course and the students' desire to take another course from the instructor. This suggests that students do not limit their preferences to instructors who give them high grades.

Faculty at KSU (where student evaluations have become a common procedure) were asked if their grading practices are influenced by the knowledge that students will be evaluating them. Only 9% acknowledged that this would be a substantial influence on them, but a sizeable minority (45%) believed their colleagues were affected by such ratings. (Research Report #36).

Thus, a variety of studies have examined the influence of extraneous variables on student ratings. The Report routinely takes two of these into account -- class size and student motivation level. It does not appear that other extraneous variables account for enough variance to require adjustments in reporting. However, users need to be aware that, in a given situation, student ratings can be influenced by such factors as strict grading standards or students' lack of proper background. Therefore, interpretations of ratings should be made with care and with an understanding of relevant situational variables.

Multiple Usage

About two-thirds of the KSU participants reported that they submitted results for administrative uses, even though the instrument is designed to aid instructional improvement. Only 31% of KSU faculty felt that student ratings should not be used in administrative decision-making. (Research Report #35). While institutional policy which mandated that such ratings be available to administrators would be unwise, it appears that some faculty/departments will impose such a policy on themselves if given the option. Given this, the individual responsible for the program should take care that ample interpretive aids are available to the administrator as well as to the faculty participant.

Evidence of Improvement

Instructors who wish to improve their teaching techniques can do so with the assistance of a diagnostic student evaluation scale. Two hundred sixty-three faculty members who had received evaluations for the same course on at least two different occasions between 1969 and 1972 showed significant improvement on 13 of 15 measures used to analyze the data. (Research Report #39). Students in later classes reported more progress on the instructor's objectives than those who had taken the same course in an earlier semester. They also reported improved teaching methods on the part of the same instructor and gave the course a more favorable rating.

This study was repeated with 348 faculty between the 1973 to 1975 time span. Similar results were found. The key evaluation measure, "Progress on Relevant Objectives", was significantly higher on the post-test at the .01 level.

Those who made the greatest gains were those who secured the greatest contact with a faculty development expert; therefore, such help is an essential element in systems which are expected to enhance teaching and its importance. In the last study cited, the Director of the Office of Educational Improvement and Innovation reviewed the names of faculty involved, and placed each in one of three groups: (1) those with whom he had "much contact" (several interviews, enrollment in a course on college teaching); (2) "some contact" (a group interpretation session, a single interview); and (3) "no contact". The "pre" scores were used as co-variates for the corresponding "post" scores in the analysis of covariance. These results indicated that, as the contact increased, progress ratings increased. (Research Report #39). While these findings do not prove effectiveness of expert help, they do demonstrate that significant improvement resulted when consultative services were made available to motivated faculty members.

Was the motivation of faculty the key variable or did the consultative assistance make the difference? A study at Wichita State examined this question by comparing Mid-term and Final-evaluation scores for two groups of faculty. Both groups volunteered to participate in a faculty development experience, but only one group was actually given the experience. Difference scores (Final minus Mid-term) favored the experimental group on 12 of the 13 items and on the Total score. Analyses of covariance were made using the Mid-score as a co-variate. Final measures of effectiveness were significantly higher for the experimental group on 5 of the 14 measures, including the Total score. (Research Report #39).

This study confirmed the KSU finding that motivated faculty members who received expert help improved more than those who did not receive such help. More importantly, it suggested that motivation alone was not enough.

That faculty members who have access to a voluntary evaluation of instruction and courses system do use the results to aid their efforts in improvement was also apparent from the interview study. Seven out of eight respondents said they used it to improve. The majority of these indicated that most changes were in methods or techniques; a few indicated changes in content. About 20% indicated that student ratings reinforced the use of present methods or affirmed what the instructor already suspected. (Research Report #44).

Still another survey confirmed the belief that faculty will respond to development and improvement activities even if these are provided on a voluntary, low key basis. Kansas State University's Office of Educational Improvement and Innovation has been in operation since 1970 and had primarily provided assistance upon the request of individuals or groups who desire help. Much has been done on a consultative basis. In 1975, all KSU faculty were asked if they had been directly stimulated by the faculty development efforts of the Office, its publications, or other activities. (Research Report #39). The following was reported by the respondents:

1. 53.6% said they had tried or were trying a new approach to teaching;

2. 64.3% said they had discussed teaching with colleagues;

3. 47.2% said they had obtained help in interpreting their student evaluation results;

4. 31.1 said they had obtained help in interpreting their student evaluation results;

5. 14.8% said they had sought direct help from the Office;

6. 11.7% said they had used referral services from the Office;

7. 61.6% said they usually read the "Teaching Notes" newsletter published by the Office.

These data suggest that faculty development programs should offer a variety of services to meet the diverse needs and preferences of individuals; an activity need not involve all the faculty to produce significant improvements in the overall quality of the instructional program. The interview study offered further confirmation of this. When asked if the Office of Educational Improvement and Innovations could be of further help (beyond the provision of the IDEA materials), 18% said "no further help was needed". Thirty-three percent indicated that individual consultation upon request was the best help that could be provided. At least 5% suggested each of the following: workshops or seminars; video-taping of instructors in practice; publications by the Office; taking the credit course, "Principles of College Teaching"; help in preparing exams; classroom visitation by the Office staff;

continued work with the graduate teaching assistants; follow-up reviews of evaluations to help individuals see trends; and provision of more information on student characteristics. (Research Report #44).

As indicated previously, faculty members took a variety of approaches in their personal improvement plans. Some tried things on their own; some sought help from colleagues, the Office of Educational Improvement and Innovation, department heads, and other sources; some read published materials; and some asked to be referred to sources of special services.

Voluntary participation in a faculty development program may not reach all the participants it should, but it can reach a large proportion of the faculty and can involve participants covering the entire range of variables. At KSU, approximately three-fourths of the faculty used the voluntary system of evaluation of instruction and courses over a three semester period. Participants who use the evaluation system were from all eight colleges and 58 of the 60 departments of the university. The random sample of users during 1976 included a broad representation of academic disciplines, ranks, class sizes, student motivation levels, and evaluation outcomes. (Research Report #44). It was encouraging that nearly one-third were from the humanities, one-third were associate or full professors and over 40% were already tenured. Over 18% received below average ratings on the item, "I would like to take another course from this instructor", even though most of the sample ranked average or better on "Progress on Relevant Objectives". They taught classes which were about evenly divided on student motivational levels, and class size distribution was very consistent with the all university distribution.

In summary, none of the faculty development services at KSU reached all the faculty. However, a very large and diverse group voluntarily participated in some aspect of the program. Those who did participate appeared to profit from the experience and a high percentage of them indicated satisfaction with the services provided.

## The Reward of Teaching

Faculty members respond to the reward system: if improved teaching is important, administrators must clearly reward good teaching and provide conditions which enhance good teaching. At KSU salaries are determined through merit considerations. A significant positive relationship has been found between student ratings of teaching effectiveness and percent salary increase. (Research Report #38). The relationship was a modest one for the total University (.20), but was considerably higher in certain segments of the University. In the applied and basic sciences, no significant correlations were found while in humanities, applied social sciences and applied arts the correlations were in the .30's and .40's. The relationships were also greater for faculty members who were most involved in teaching (those with lower ranks, those teaching in non-Ph.D. degree programs; those spending the greatest amount of time teaching).

in the sample of IDEA users, over one-third of the respondents stressed that better rewards for good teaching was the best way to stimulate better teaching on the KSU campus. It appears that administrators are responding to this need.

## CONCLUSIONS

The two year experience with National Project III permitted us to accomplish more than we anticipated. We met our original objectives and addressed several more.

The intensive look at our evaluation system confirmed many of our hypotheses, but also provided a few surprises. The system appears to be working efficiently; and though there was some criticism of the objectives, they were acceptable to most faculty. Criticisms of the form gave direction to future improvement efforts.

We had planned to create supplementary forms or devices to meet the special needs of some areas. Preliminary work changed our strategy; it appears that the encouragement of additional questions by those who need them is the more realistic solution. It was encouraging to discover that our users were already doing this to a much greater degree than we had realized.

Regrettably, the Report was not being used as fully as it could be. There was a tendency to interpret the information "logically" without regard to the full diagnostic power of the system. This suggests that greater effort should be made by this Office to encourage more appropriate and sophisticated interpretation of results.

Most faculty members took results in stride and did not experience undue anxiety. This may be a side benefit from using the system over an extended period.

The findings confirmed a number of hypotheses concerning the effects of extraneous circumstances on results. Teaching performance and its effectiveness are considerably less influenced by outside factors than many people believe. It seems especially important to note that our findings confirmed that grades apparently play only a small role in the evaluation process.

Considerable evidence was found that faculty members can improve their teaching effectiveness through the use of a diagnostic tool, even if they don't use it to its fullest potential. Those who made the greatest gains were motivated to change and had the services of an "expert" available to assist them.

It is also important to note that not all faculty will, or need to, participate in each faculty development activity; but if enough variety is provided, most faculty members will participate in at least some

development activities. This not only confirms that individual needs vary widely, but offers considerable reassurance as to the importance faculty members in general attached to teaching.

A surprising finding was the degree of tolerance shown by faculty at KSU for the use of their results for administrative decision-making. Perhaps, this is more of an indication of the confidence that has developed in the system over the years through its use in merit decisions.

The KSU system is now about eight years old. Although it has experienced many trials and tribulations, it appears to be a well accepted tool for assessing and improving instruction on the campus. Further refinements could improve some aspects of the program, but in its present form it has served to elevate the importance of teaching at KSU. Other institutions interested in following similar procedures should be prepared for the necessity of developing confidence and trust in the system, a process which may require several years of trial and error.

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